“Exploring the Influence of Local Cultural Experience Offerings on Tourist Accommodation Preferences: A Consumer Behavior Perspective in the Context of Meghalaya, North East India”

Synopsis of the Research Proposal

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Abstract:

Tourism is undergoing a profound transition, with travelers increasingly seeking immersive cultural experiences that foster meaningful interaction with local communities and traditions. This study examines the influence of local cultural experience offerings on tourists’ accommodation preferences in Meghalaya, North East India, an area distinguished by its tribal diversity, ecological richness, and matrilineal social structure. Adopting a consumer behavior framework, the research analyzes how the incorporation of cultural elements - such as traditional music, cuisine, craft workshops, and eco-friendly practices, shapes tourist decision-making regarding accommodation choices. The study explores both cognitive and affective determinants underpinning these choices, offering insights into the intersection of cultural authenticity and consumer motivation. The findings are expected to inform accommodation providers seeking product differentiation, assist policymakers in formulating sustainable tourism strategies that align with regional values, and enable local communities to safeguard their cultural heritage while deriving equitable economic benefits.

Keywords: Cultural tourism, Experiential travel, Consumer Behavior, Accommodation preferences, Meghalaya, North East India, Local cultural experiences, Homestays, Community-based tourism, Cultural authenticity, Sustainable tourism, Tourist decision-making, Rational and emotional drivers, Policy implications, Cultural preservation

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is experiencing a significant transformation, as travelers are prioritizing immersive and enriching cultural experiences rather than conventional sightseeing. This trend, commonly referred to as experiential or cultural tourism, focuses on profound engagement with local communities, customs, and ways of life. It holds particular significance in places such as Meghalaya, a region in North East India known for its cultural richness and ecological diversity.

India, known for its rich cultural and ecological variety, has witnessed a notable growth in experiential tourism, particularly in its off-the-beaten-path areas. Meghalaya, a small state located in the northeastern part of the country, serves as an intriguing example of this trend. This state is home to three prominent tribal groups—the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo—and features a unique blend of cultural elements defined by matrilineal inheritance, traditional belief systems, distinct musical practices, and eco-friendly ways of living. Attractions like the living root bridges found in Cherrapunji and Mawlynnong, sacred groves, and cultural events such as Shad Suk Mynsiem and Wangala are increasingly drawing the interest of both international and domestic travelers.

In the last ten years, Meghalaya's tourism infrastructure has expanded, featuring a variety of homestays, eco-lodges, guesthouses, and community-managed accommodations. These options not only offer places to stay but also include local experiences like traditional cooking classes, music shows, guided nature hikes, and craft workshops as part of their appeal. Nevertheless, in spite of these advancements, there is a lack of empirical studies

exploring how these culturally enriched experiences affect tourists' accommodation choices in the area, especially from a consumer behavior standpoint.

Understanding the behavioral motivations behind accommodation choices in culturally rich destinations is essential for multiple stakeholders:

- Accommodation providers can leverage such insights for differentiation and product innovation.
- Policy makers and tourism boards can design sustainable tourism strategies aligned with local values.
- Local communities can ensure cultural preservation while benefiting economically.

Understanding this relationship is vital for several stakeholders, accommodation providers seeking to differentiate themselves, policymakers promoting sustainable tourism, and communities aiming to benefit economically without compromising cultural integrity. This study, therefore, aims to explore a critical gap by analyzing how the availability and promotion of local cultural experiences affect tourists' decisions on where to stay in Meghalaya, considering both rational and emotional drivers of consumer behavior.

Conceptual Definitions

To establish a clear conceptual foundation, the key constructs relevant to this study are outlined below:

- *Local Cultural Experience Offerings*: Activities or services provided by accommodation establishments that immerse tourists in indigenous traditions, lifestyles, and practices. This includes local cuisine, music, folklore, rituals, handicrafts, and community interactions.

- *Tourist Accommodation Preferences*: The set of choices, inclinations, and criteria that tourists use in selecting where to stay, influenced by factors such as comfort, location, price, cultural offerings, and service quality.

- *Consumer Behavior*: The study of individuals and groups and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of travel-related services, including the emotional, cognitive, and social factors influencing these decisions.

- *Experiential Tourism*: A form of tourism focused on personal engagement and cultural immersion, where tourists participate in activities that provide a sense of place, connection, and authenticity.

- *Cultural Capital*: A concept referring to the knowledge, familiarity, and appreciation of cultural experiences that can influence consumer choices and enhance perceived value.

Theoretical Overview and Literature Context

The linkage between cultural experience offerings and accommodation preferences is rooted in several theoretical streams:

- *The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)* explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence tourist intentions and behavior. Tourists with a strong preference for cultural immersion may be more inclined toward accommodation options that provide such experiences.

- *Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy Framework* posits that consumers seek memorable experiences rather than goods or services. Accommodations that stage or co-create cultural experiences may, therefore, hold greater appeal.

- *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)* can be adapted to understand travel motivations, especially at the self-actualization level, where tourists seek meaning, identity, and cultural engagement.

- *Push and Pull Motivation Theory (Dann, 1977)* highlights that internal motives (push) such as curiosity or escapism, combined with external attractions (pull) like cultural festivals or heritage sites, influence destination and accommodation choice.

- *Servicescape Theory (Bitner, 1992)* is relevant in understanding how the physical and symbolic environment of accommodation, when infused with local culture, affects consumer perceptions, emotions, and satisfaction.

Despite the availability of such theoretical models, specific empirical work tying these frameworks to tourism in Meghalaya, especially from a micro consumer decision-making lens is scarce.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

This research will be grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining:

1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) – to explain intention and actual behavior of tourists.
2. Experience Economy Framework – to evaluate how cultural offerings are consumed as experiences.
3. Push and Pull Motivation Theory – to segment the motivational factors driving cultural tourism.
4. Consumer Decision-Making Process Models – particularly Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model to understand the sequential steps tourists follow in selecting accommodation.

The integration of these frameworks provides a strong perspective for examining the cognitive and emotional processes that influence tourist preferences in Meghalaya, taking into account both internal psychological factors and external experiential signals.

Problem Framing and Analytical Perspective

The tourism scene in Meghalaya reflects a vibrant blend of cultural preservation and the growth of commercial tourism. Although the surge in tourists provides economic advantages, it also brings up issues related to cultural commodification, environmental harm, and a

diminishing sense of authenticity. As lodging options evolve into more than mere places to reside and instead become entrances to local culture, it is essential to comprehend how tourists interpret, appreciate, and react to offerings of cultural experiences.

From a perspective of consumer behavior, this study positions tourists not just as passive consumers, but as engaged participants in cultural exchange. The main issue being examined is: How significantly do local cultural experiences impact the accommodation decisions of tourists traveling to Meghalaya? This inquiry allows for the exploration of additional questions such as:

- Do travelers perceive local cultural experiences as enhancing the value of accommodation?
- What types of cultural offerings are most influential in preference formation?
- In what ways do demographics, motivations, and previous travel experiences influence these preferences?

This study aims to enhance theoretical understanding by expanding consumer behavior models within the context of culturally rooted tourism, and to offer practical, evidence-based suggestions for accommodation providers, tourism planners, and local communities.

2. Literature Review

Travel has evolved beyond merely exploring scenic views; it's now centered on the pursuit of genuine, immersive cultural encounters. This shift is particularly noticeable in places like Meghalaya in North East India, where cultural tourism has gained prominence. The distinctive cultural attributes of Meghalaya create a valuable framework for examining how local cultural experiences affect tourists' lodging choices. As travelers increasingly look for immersive cultural experiences, their accommodation choices are evolving. In places like Meghalaya, local cultural experiences significantly impact tourists' accommodation preferences. This literature review aims to investigate how these cultural experiences affect tourists' choices in lodging, particularly emphasizing the relationship between consumer behavior and cultural tourism. By analyzing important trends, concepts, and research outcomes, this review will enhance the understanding of how local culture shapes the tourism industry, particularly in the context of Meghalaya.

The Rise of Experiential and Cultural Tourism

In recent decades, the global tourism industry has undergone significant changes as travelers increasingly value experiences that allow them to connect with the culture, traditions, and local customs of their destinations. This change is best explained by Pine and Gilmore's (1999) influential idea of the "Experience Economy," which suggests that modern tourists seek memorable and immersive experiences rather than just passive observation. Tourists, particularly those interested in cultural tourism, are looking for profound connections with the places they explore, making their experiences more significant and fulfilling. This evolution is evident in the rising demand for destinations that provide authentic and culturally rich settings, which in turn influences the types of accommodations that travelers prefer.

Expanding on this notion, MacCannell (1973) presented the notion of "authenticity," claiming that cultural tourists are increasingly attracted to locations that provide real cultural experiences. Authenticity is regarded as an essential element of the tourism experience, as it fulfills travelers' aspirations for more profound connections with local communities and practices. This perspective corresponds with Richards' (2001) observations regarding the global growth of cultural tourism, where tourists are no longer content to simply witness local customs and traditions but instead seek to engage with them actively. The yearning for active involvement, as opposed to mere observation, is a significant factor in cultural tourism that greatly impacts tourists' choices regarding accommodations.

Cohen (1988) underscored the significant psychological changes that can result from immersing oneself in a culture. This form of immersion often prompts travelers to prefer lodging that enriches their cultural experience, including options like homestays, guesthouses, or eco-resorts. Such accommodations enable tourists to live alongside local residents, allowing for direct engagement with their customs and ways of life. Saxena (2009) also pointed out that cultural tourists tend to favor lodgings that offer authentic, locally rooted experiences, such as involvement in local rituals, culinary traditions, or community celebrations. The increasing desire for culturally immersive accommodations has transformed the tourism sector, leading to lodging establishments that cater to these shifting demands.

Kumar and Devi (2023) investigated the behavioral reasons behind the choices of cultural tourists in North East India and discovered that more than 65% of participants specifically selected lodging that offered opportunities for engaging in local cultural experiences, such as craft-making sessions, traditional cooking classes, or involvement in festivals. The research determined that the pursuit of cultural authenticity was the main factor influencing accommodation preferences for travelers interested in cultural experiences, rather than factors like cost or luxury.

Patel and Rawat (2022) investigated how "cultural embeddedness" within accommodation services enhances tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Their study, conducted in Rajasthan and Meghalaya, showed that tourists who stayed in culturally themed accommodations, like tribal homestays and heritage havelis, experienced greater emotional involvement, which notably affected their intention to return. The research highlighted that integrating local narratives, symbols, and rituals into the lodging experience plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions of authenticity and value.

Collectively, these research efforts establish a strong basis for comprehending the change in accommodation choices towards options that provide genuine cultural involvement. The growth of experiential and cultural tourism has opened up fresh possibilities for accommodations to play an active role in providing significant cultural experiences.

Local Cultural Offerings in Meghalaya

Meghalaya, commonly known as the "Abode of Clouds," presents a unique cultural and ecological landscape that attracts tourists in search of authenticity. The state's matrilineal societies, diverse indigenous traditions, sacred groves, and lively festivals create the perfect backdrop for cultural tourism. According to Syiemlieh and Momin (2015), important cultural characteristics of Meghalaya include the matrilineal social frameworks of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes, along with sacred groves and native festivals, which influence the tourism

dynamics of the area. These cultural aspects not only draw in visitors but also significantly impact their choices regarding accommodation.

For example, the living root bridges found in Meghalaya are exclusive to the region and reflect the creativity of the local tribes, presenting tourists with a chance to immerse themselves in both the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area. Bhattacharya and Laskar (2017) highlighted the appeal of these ecological marvels, stating that they are closely linked to the cultural identity of the region and provide visitors with an opportunity to engage with the sustainable living practices of local communities. More and more travelers to Meghalaya are looking for accommodations that allow them to access such cultural landmarks, as they offer a genuine way to experience the traditions and natural splendor of the region.

The indigenous festivals of the region, including the Wangala Festival, represent a vital part of its cultural landscape. Bardhan (2018) examined the potential for tourism in relation to these festivals, highlighting how they offer lodging providers a chance to incorporate cultural experiences into their offerings. Celebrating local customs, music, dance, and rituals, these festivals create an immersive atmosphere for visitors, ensuring they are a crucial component of the lodging experience.

Tiwari and Bhagat (2020) elaborated on this by examining how local crafts, cuisine, and various cultural aspects influence tourists' choices of accommodation. For instance, tourists might favor lodgings that provide opportunities to engage with local artisans or take part in traditional cooking classes. This interest in cultural engagement is further reinforced by the increasing popularity of community-based tourism in Meghalaya, which focuses on cultural immersion and facilitates direct interactions with local residents. Kharshiing (2021) noted the rising trend of homestays and eco-resorts in Meghalaya, where accommodations are crafted to offer guests genuine cultural experiences that enable them to experience life as the locals do.

The cultural attractions in Meghalaya significantly influence tourists' choices for accommodations. Travelers seeking genuine cultural experiences have created a need for lodgings that offer more than mere shelter—they act as portals to immerse visitors in the area's traditions, customs, and lifestyle.

Consumer Behavior and Accommodation Preferences

The connection between cultural experiences and lodging selections is fundamentally linked to consumer behavior concepts. Research by Kim et al. (2007) highlighted that the motivations of travelers, including a quest for authenticity, a thirst for new experiences, and cultural interest, play a crucial role in their choices of accommodation. Travelers who seek out cultural engagement are more inclined to select lodgings that provide opportunities for traditional practices or local interactions. Mao et al. (2018) supported this idea by showing that tourists who value authenticity in their travel experiences often choose accommodations that showcase local culture, such as homestays or boutique hotels that include cultural activities, rather than large, uniform hotel chains.

Hwang et al. (2019) explored the role of cultural experiences in enhancing tourist satisfaction, arguing that accommodations offering cultural activities, such as local tours, workshops, or traditional cooking classes, significantly improve the tourist experience. This satisfaction, in turn, increases the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth

recommendations. This is crucial in the context of Meghalaya, where tourists often seek unique cultural experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Zhou and Ap (2009) found that cultural tourists are particularly inclined to select accommodations that reflect their cultural interests, frequently opting for eco-resorts or sustainable lodging options that promote local heritage and environmental conservation.

Chen et al. (2014) examined the psychological elements that influence tourists' choices regarding accommodations, such as the pursuit of novelty, curiosity, and the craving for new and distinct experiences. These elements are especially pertinent to cultural tourism, where travelers often seek to break away from their usual routines and engage with different cultures. For numerous visitors to Meghalaya, the chance to stay in culturally vibrant lodgings that provide traditional cuisine, crafts, and rituals satisfies these psychological desires.

Desai and Thomas (2022) introduced a "Cultural Attachment Model" for the hospitality industry, proposing that a strong emotional connection to a culture greatly impacts intentions to book and satisfaction after a stay. Their study indicates that when lodging options are promoted as gateways to cultural experiences rather than merely places to spend the night, consumers shift their decision-making from logical assessments (such as cost and location) to emotional connections.

Roy et al. (2024) explored the impact of tailored cultural experiences in lodgings on the perception of authenticity. Their research emphasized that specially curated activities, like private folk dance shows, personalized cooking lessons, or unique storytelling sessions, foster a feeling of exclusivity and connection, thereby affecting tourists' choices for culturally immersive accommodations as opposed to traditional hotels.

Combined, these studies highlight the substantial impact that cultural experiences have on the lodging preferences of tourists. As travelers place a greater emphasis on immersing themselves in local culture, accommodations that provide genuine, culturally rich experiences are becoming more sought after.

The Role of Digital Platforms in Shaping Accommodation Preferences

Digital platforms have become a crucial element of the tourism sector, shaping travelers' choices in accommodations in ways never seen before. Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2004) emphasized the significance of online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Airbnb, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor in spreading information about cultural lodging options. These platforms allow travelers to investigate various lodging possibilities, check reviews, and view images prior to making a choice. Sigala (2017) further elaborated on this by looking at how social media sites like Instagram and Facebook function as digital showcases for cultural tourism. On these platforms, tourists can narrate their experiences, connect with local culture, and uncover new destinations and places to stay.

Li et al. (2018) showed that content created by users, such as reviews, ratings, and images shared by fellow travelers, has a considerable impact on how tourists perceive cultural accommodations. Favorable reviews that underscore genuine cultural experiences, like staying in a local homestay or engaging in a traditional ceremony, can enhance the attractiveness of these lodging options. Leung et al. (2013) highlighted the significance of

positive online reviews, specifically those that reference cultural activities, in influencing tourists' choices for accommodations.

Cai and Li (2020) posited that digital platforms facilitate cultural tourists in discovering accommodations that provide authentic and immersive experiences. These platforms enhance both the visibility and accessibility of culturally immersive lodging choices, allowing tourists to reserve accommodations that match their interest in genuine cultural interaction. In Meghalaya, digital platforms have been instrumental in promoting homestays, eco-resorts, and community-based tourism projects that showcase the region's distinct cultural features.

Chakraborty et al. (2024) examined how online reviews and social media content affect the choices made by tourists regarding accommodations. Their research reveals that user-generated content showcasing cultural experiences, like participating in local festivals or residing with indigenous families, garnered much greater engagement and conversion rates compared to traditional hotel photos. This demonstrates a change in consumer preferences towards lodging that provides not just physical comfort but also cultural enhancement.

Sustainable Tourism and Community Impact

Sustainable tourism is an important aspect of cultural tourism, especially in areas like Meghalaya, where maintaining local culture and heritage is vital. Bramwell and Lane (2000) presented the idea of sustainable tourism within the scope of cultural tourism, emphasizing its ability to benefit local economies while safeguarding cultural heritage. In Meghalaya, the implementation of sustainable tourism practices is crucial, as the region's cultural customs and natural surroundings are key components of the tourism experience.

Smith (2012) warned that excessive commercialization of cultural experiences could jeopardize their authenticity and harm the integrity of local customs. Over-tourism, especially in culturally rich areas like Meghalaya, can result in the commodification of indigenous culture, transforming once-significant practices into simple spectacles for visitors. Butler (2006) noted that when managed effectively, cultural tourism has the potential to promote community development while preserving cultural and environmental sustainability. In the context of Meghalaya, achieving this balance is essential as the tourism sector expands.

Dewailly et al. (2018) highlighted the necessity of reconciling the economic advantages of tourism with the conservation of cultural heritage. Chauhan and Pathak (2021) examined community-based tourism in Meghalaya, demonstrating that options such as homestays support local socio-economic growth while safeguarding cultural traditions. These types of accommodations allow travelers to engage with the local lifestyle while delivering financial rewards to the community.

Singh and Ahmad (2023) investigated how sustainability and community engagement influence preferences for tourist accommodations. They found that younger travelers, particularly those from Gen Z and Millennials, are more likely to select options that benefit local communities and preserve cultural heritage. The research indicated that accommodations that provide eco-friendly initiatives along with cultural experiences, such as traditional farming tours, storytelling sessions with local elders, and folk music events, gained higher trust and emotional connection from guests. This reinforces the notion that consumer behavior in tourism is increasingly driven by values, focusing on ethical and cultural sustainability.

Consequently, sustainable tourism is an essential factor when discussing cultural tourism in Meghalaya. By encouraging community-focused tourism and facilitating culturally enriching lodging options, the area can maintain its cultural heritage while also delivering economic advantages to local residents.

3. Present Study

This research seeks to examine how local cultural experiences affect tourists' choices of accommodation in Meghalaya, a state in North East India that is rich in culture and ecological diversity. As the global tourism industry increasingly leans toward cultural experiences, it is essential to comprehend the elements that influence these preferences, particularly in up-and-coming tourist destinations like Meghalaya. The main goal of this study is to explore the dynamic connection between local cultural experiences (such as traditional foods, local festivals, customary practices, matrilineal communities, and ecologically important sites) and the lodging selections made by visitors.

The research also examines the influence of digital platforms (such as Airbnb, Booking.com, Instagram) on these preferences, along with the effects of sustainable tourism practices on local communities and the conservation of cultural heritage. By engaging with tourists and local tourism providers (e.g., homestays, guest houses, eco-resorts), the research will provide comprehensive insights into how community-based tourism and eco-tourism initiatives align with tourists' desires for authentic and immersive cultural experiences.

The key research questions that guide the study are as follows:

1. How do local cultural experiences shape tourists' accommodation preferences in Meghalaya?
2. What role do community-based accommodations (e.g., homestays, eco-resorts) play in enhancing cultural immersion?
3. How do digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, TripAdvisor) influence tourists' decisions to opt for culturally immersive accommodations?
4. What are the implications of these changing accommodation preferences for sustainable tourism in Meghalaya?

This study is particularly important in the context of Meghalaya’s tourism sector, which is increasingly being shaped by cultural tourists seeking more than just natural beauty they seek an experience that connects them to the heritage, rituals, and traditions of the region.

3.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite growing interest in cultural tourism, there remains a significant gap in understanding how *local cultural experience offerings shape tourists’ accommodation preferences*, especially from a *consumer behavior perspective* in Meghalaya. While existing studies highlight:

- Tourists’ appreciation for tribal culture, traditions, and landscapes in Meghalaya, alongside concerns around infrastructure and marketing.
- The importance of weaving cultural heritage into marketing strategies for sustainable tourism promotion.

These efforts do not delve into how such cultural offerings actually influence the behavioral decision-making of tourists when choosing where to stay.

Specifically, the underexplored areas include:

1. Decision Drivers: What *motivates* tourists to select accommodations tied to cultural experiences, such as participation in local rituals, architecture reflecting indigenous styles, or proximity to tribal events?

2. Impact Mechanisms: How do these offerings affect *perceived value*, *emotional engagement*, or *satisfaction*, and subsequently determine accommodation preference?

3. Contextual Moderators: Do factors such as demographic profiles, prior travel experience, or sustainability concerns moderate the influence of cultural experience offerings?

4. Behavioral Consequences: How do these influences translate into repeat visits, recommendations, or willingness to pay?

Thus, this study aims to fill these research gaps by examining the *consumer behavior process*, from motivations and evaluations to actual accommodation choices, in response to local cultural experience offerings in Meghalaya.

3.2 Significance / Rationale of the Study

Motivation & Justification

- *Academic Contribution*: Extends the literature in cultural tourism and consumer behavior by integrating behavioral models (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior, Experience Economy) into the study of culturally immersive lodging choices.
- *Local Applicability*: Offers empirically grounded insights relevant to Meghalaya's tourism development, where limited behavioral research exists.

Importance & Benefits

- *For Accommodation Providers*: Helps homestay owners, guesthouse operators, and eco-resorts understand what cultural components elevate their offerings in the eyes of tourists, thereby enabling value-based service design.
- *For Policymakers*: Informs policy frameworks to prioritize cultural authenticity, such as guidelines for heritage-themed stays, community incentive schemes, and capacity-building programs (e.g., as discussed in tourism marketing and infrastructure gaps)
- *For Local Communities*: Enhances sustainable tourism practices that preserve cultural integrity while generating livelihood, not through commodification alone but via meaningful engagement.

Operational Definitions

To clarify scope, the following key terms are operationalized in the context of this study:

- *Local Cultural Experience Offerings*: Any accommodation-related features that provide authentic exposure to local tribal culture, including edible traditions, architecture, participatory rituals, language/craft workshops, and community events.

- *Accommodation Preferences*: Tourists' lodging decisions, evaluated through measures such as choice rationales, satisfaction ratings, intention to revisit, and willingness to recommend.
- *Consumer Behavior Processes*: The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral steps tourists go through, from pre-stay information search and expectations to post-stay evaluations.
- *Cultural Immersion Lodging*: Accommodations like homestays, heritage cottages, or eco-resorts where cultural engagement is deliberately integrated into the guest experience.

3.3 Objectives of the Study

Main Objectives

1. *To investigate* how local cultural experience offerings influence tourists' accommodation preferences in Meghalaya, through cognitive and affective behavioral processes.
2. *To identify* which specific cultural elements (e.g., culinary experiences, traditional architecture, ritual participation) are most influential in accommodation choices.
3. *To examine* how tourist demographics (age, nationality, travel motivations) and sustainability orientation moderate the impact of cultural offerings on lodging preferences.
4. *To assess* outcomes such as satisfaction, repeat intention, and word-of-mouth regarding cultural immersion stays.
5. *To provide* recommendations for accommodation providers, policymakers, and communities to co-create culturally immersive and behaviorally aligned tourist lodging experiences.

3.4 Hypotheses / Research Questions

Research Hypotheses (H1–H6)

These hypotheses express the **expectations of relationships** between key variables:

- **Independent Variable (IV)**: Local cultural experience offerings
- **Dependent Variable (DV)**: Tourist accommodation preferences
- **Moderators/Controls**: Demographics, sustainability orientation, previous travel experience, etc.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the availability of local cultural experience offerings and tourists' preference for culturally immersive accommodations in Meghalaya.

H2: Tourists' perceived authenticity of local cultural experiences positively influences their satisfaction with chosen accommodations.

H3: Tourists with a high interest in cultural learning are more likely to choose accommodations that offer direct participation in local cultural activities (e.g., festivals, cooking, rituals).

H4: The influence of cultural experience offerings on accommodation preference is stronger among international tourists than domestic tourists.

H5: Sustainability-oriented tourists show higher preference for accommodations that offer authentic cultural experiences combined with eco-friendly practices.

H6: Tourists' prior exposure to Northeast India moderates the relationship between cultural offerings and accommodation preference—first-time visitors place higher importance on cultural immersion.

Research Questions (RQs)

1. What types of local cultural experience offerings do tourists value most when selecting accommodations in Meghalaya?
2. How do tourists perceive the authenticity and quality of cultural immersion offered by different types of accommodations (homestays, guesthouses, eco-resorts)?
3. What are the key psychological and behavioral factors (e.g., curiosity, cultural motivation, novelty-seeking) influencing accommodation preferences?
4. How do digital platforms (e.g., travel reviews, social media content) affect tourists' perceptions of cultural accommodation offerings?
5. What role does sustainability consciousness play in shaping tourist preferences for culturally immersive stays?

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design, which allows for the investigation of the cultural dimensions of accommodation choices and an understanding of the drivers behind these decisions. The research will focus on gathering both primary data (via surveys, interviews, and observations) and secondary data (through content analysis of online platforms).

Type of Study: The research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques to understand how cultural experiences impact accommodation preferences among tourists in Meghalaya. The methodology is designed to capture both the objective patterns and subjective perceptions of tourists and local tourism providers. This design allows for rich, contextual insight into consumer behavior while enabling robust statistical validation.

Strategic Framework:

1. *Qualitative* Phase: Employs exploratory methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and potentially participant observation to reveal the subtleties of tourists' values, motivations, and emotional reactions to cultural experiences. This approach is consistent with traditional cultural tourism techniques like ethnography and case studies aimed at understanding the lived context.

2. *Quantitative Phase*: Employs a descriptive-correlational framework with structured questionnaires to assess the connections between factors such as cultural immersion options and lodging preferences. This approach enables inferential analysis utilizing descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression models.

3. *Revised Structure*: The research starts with a qualitative investigation to enhance the constructs and develop the instrument, which is then succeeded by quantitative data gathering aimed at testing hypotheses and applying findings to a larger segment of the tourism population.

Data Analysis Methods

- *Quantitative Data*: Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation, will be employed to analyze the survey data, offering a summary of tourists' preferences. Statistical tests like chi-square or t-tests will be used to identify correlations between tourist demographics (e.g., age, nationality) and accommodation preferences. Factor analysis may also be employed to identify underlying factors that drive accommodation choices (e.g., cultural authenticity, comfort, price).

- *Qualitative Data*: The interview transcripts and social media content will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This will involve:
    - Coding the data into themes related to cultural experiences, accommodation preferences, and sustainability.
    - Identifying key patterns, insights, and contradictions in responses from both tourists and providers.
    - Drawing connections between the qualitative data and existing literature on cultural tourism and consumer behavior.

4.2 Sample / Participants

Tourist Sample: Tourists will be selected through a random sampling method at various tourist destinations across Meghalaya. The sample will aim to reflect a diverse demographic, including both international and domestic tourists.

Service Provider Sample: The interviewees will be selected based on their involvement in community-based and eco-tourism initiatives. Efforts will be made to ensure a balance between homestay owners, eco-resort managers, and other tourism service providers to represent various accommodation types.

1. ***Sampling Strategy****:*
    a) *Quantitative Phase*: Uses *stratified random sampling* to ensure representation across key tourist segments, domestic vs. international, age groups, and sustainability-oriented vs. general tourists.

b) *Qualitative Phase*: Employs purposive sampling to recruit tourists with varied experiences (e.g., first-time vs. return visitors), along with homestay hosts and tourism stakeholders. Snowball sampling may aid in recruiting tourists who participated in cultural immersion activities.

2. ***Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria****:*
    a) *Include*: Tourists above 18 who stayed in cultural-immersion accommodations during their Meghalaya visit.
    b) *Exclude*: Quick transit visitors or those staying exclusively in mainstream hotels with no cultural programming.
3. ***Recruitment****:*
    a) On-site approach at cultural tourism centers
    b) Digital outreach via social media pages.

4. ***Sample Size Determination****:*
    a) *Qualitative*: Aim for saturation, approx. 20–30 interviews, plus 3–5 focus groups of 6–8 participants each.
    b) *Quantitative*: Minimum sample of 300 responses to ensure statistical power for regression analysis, with stratification ensuring demographic diversity.

4.3 Data Collection

Survey of Tourists:

- A structured questionnaire will be developed to survey a sample of 200-300 tourists visiting Meghalaya.
- The survey will be administered at key tourist hubs such as airports, bus terminals, popular tourist attractions, and accommodation sites.
- The questionnaire will include both closed and open-ended questions to understand tourists' motivations, accommodation choices, and perceptions of cultural experiences. Specific areas covered will include:
    - Motivation for visiting (e.g., cultural heritage, festivals, natural attractions).
    - Accommodation preferences (e.g., homestays, eco-resorts, hotels).
    - Influence of cultural activities (e.g., indigenous festivals, crafts, cuisine).
    - Impact of digital platforms and reviews on accommodation choices.

*Interviews with Local Service Providers****:***

- In-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 15-20 accommodation providers, such as homestay owners, eco-resort managers, and other operators in the region.
- These interviews will gather insights into how these businesses market their services, the cultural experiences they offer, and their perceptions of tourists' needs and preferences.
- Questions will focus on how local culture is integrated into the accommodation experience, the challenges faced in promoting cultural tourism, and strategies for sustainability.

Content Analysis of Online Reviews and Social Media:

- Reviews and user-generated content on popular platforms such as TripAdvisor, Airbnb, Booking.com, Makemytrip, and Instagram will be analyzed.
- The analysis will focus on the perception of cultural experiences offered by accommodations and how they are represented online.
- The study will look at recurring themes in online reviews that relate to cultural authenticity, the quality of cultural engagement, and the overall satisfaction of tourists.

i) Primary Data Collection

- **Universe**: All tourists who experience cultural-immersion stays in Meghalaya during a defined tourism season (e.g., 1-6 months).

- **Sampling Design**:
  i. *Quantitative*: Stratified random sampling across destinations and tourist types.
  ii. *Qualitative*: Purposive and snowball sampling for targeted depth.

- **Tools**:
  i. *Qualitative*: Semi-structured interview guides and focus group protocols.
  ii. *Quantitative*: Structured questionnaires administered online and in-person.

- **Measurement Techniques**:
  i. Likert scales for perceptions and satisfaction.
  ii. Behavioral intention scales (e.g. purchase, revisit).
  iii. Environment and motivation scales drawn from TPB and Experience Economy literature.

- **Data Analysis Tools**:
  i. *Quantitative*: Use of SPSS or similar software for descriptive stats, factor analysis, and regression modeling.
  ii. *Qualitative*: Thematic analysis

ii) Secondary Data Collection

- Review policy documents (e.g., Draft Tourism Policy, homestay subsidy schemes) and academic literature on cultural tourism in Meghalaya.
- Conduct case studies of successful culturally immersive homestays to contextualize findings.

iii) Procedure

- Obtain permissions from local tourism authorities and community leaders for fieldwork.
- Pilot-test survey instruments with a small sample to refine clarity and reliability.
- Conduct in-field data collection during peak tourist seasons (e.g., festivals, holidays).
- Ensure translation and cultural appropriateness in interview protocols.

iv) Ethical Considerations

- Secure *informed consent* from participants, explaining study purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality.
- Ensure *anonymity* via de-identified data and secure storage.

- Be sensitive to cultural norms when interacting with tribal communities and obtaining permissions.
- Share research outcomes with community stakeholders to inform local planning and preserve reciprocity.

5. Data Analysis / Discussion

5.1. Cultural Influences on Accommodation Preferences

Initial findings are expected to show that cultural immersion is a significant factor in tourists' accommodation preferences. Tourists are increasingly opting for homestays and eco-resorts due to the opportunities they offer for deeper engagement with the local culture. These preferences are expected to correlate strongly with tourists' desire for authentic experiences that go beyond passive observation of culture.

5.2. Influence of Digital Platforms

The analysis of online reviews and social media will likely reveal the crucial role that digital platforms play in shaping accommodation decisions. Positive feedback emphasizing cultural experiences, including engagement with indigenous communities or involvement in local festivals, is likely to enhance the attractiveness of culturally immersive lodgings. Instagram posts that feature local crafts, cuisine, and traditions may also encourage travelers to pursue comparable experiences.

5.3. Community-Based Tourism and Sustainability

The results from discussions with local providers are expected to highlight the importance of community-based tourism in harmonizing cultural engagement with sustainable practices. Providers that deliver culturally immersive experiences, like local cooking lessons, artisan workshops, or involvement in indigenous celebrations, are probably to draw in more tourists interested in cultural authenticity. These offerings not only respond to the increasing desire for genuine experiences but also bolster the local economy and aid in maintaining traditional cultural practices.

5.4. Implications for Tourism Providers

This research will explore how these findings impact tourism providers in Meghalaya. It is anticipated that lodging establishments that prioritize local culture, sustainable tourism methods, and genuine experiences will have greater success in drawing in visitors. Adapting accommodations to showcase Meghalaya's cultural heritage will be crucial for capitalizing on the increasing demand for cultural tourism.

6. Limitations & Delimitations

6.1. Limitations

- **Sample Size**: This research will examine a limited group of tourists (200-300), which could restrict the applicability of the results to a wider tourist demographic.

- **Subjectivity in Interviews**: The qualitative information gathered from interviews with tourism providers might be swayed by individual biases or promotional tactics, potentially impacting the neutrality of the answers.

- **Access to Participants**: Some tourists may be unwilling to participate in surveys or share detailed feedback about their experiences, leading to potential response bias.

6.2. Delimitations

- **Geographical Focus**: The study is limited to Meghalaya, and its findings may not be directly applicable to other regions in India or beyond.

- **Tourist Profile**: The research focuses primarily on tourists seeking cultural experiences, which excludes those whose main motivation is nature tourism or adventure activities.

7. Work Plan of the Research

Stage 1: Preparation (1-2 Months)

- Finalizing the research framework and survey instruments (questionnaires, interview guides).
- Developing a detailed work plan with timelines and resource allocation.
- Identifying and reaching out to tourism providers for interviews and establishing collaboration with key stakeholders.

Stage 2: Data Collection (5-7 Months)

- Administering the tourist survey at selected locations in Meghalaya.
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with accommodation providers.
- Analyzing content on digital platforms to gather relevant reviews and social media posts.

Stage 3: Data Analysis (2-3 Months)

- Analyzing quantitative data using statistical methods.
- Performing thematic analysis on qualitative data from interviews and content analysis.

Stage 4: Report Writing and Recommendations (2 Months)

- Synthesizing the data into a cohesive report, including findings, discussions, and conclusions.
- Formulating practical recommendations for tourism providers and policymakers in Meghalaya.
- Finalizing and submitting

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